

Presentation of Meena Raman, Third World Network

at High Level Panel on 2nd July 2006.

1. Sustainable development has 3 aspects – economic, social, and environmental. It is underpinned by the Rio principles including both “common but differentiated responsibility” (which is a development principle) and the “precautionary principle” (the environment principle). There cannot be one without the other. In other words, we have to put stress on tackling the growing environment crises but in the context of international equity. There must be greater priority to the environment but there must be environmental space for developing countries to implement the rights of local communities and peoples in the South. Environmental justice and sustainable development go together.
2. Based on these principles, we need to strengthen the 3 major institutions of sustainable development, i.e. the CSD, the UNEP and the multilateral agreements and secretariats. (MEAS). All three have to expand the rights and roles of CSOs in their activities, operations and decisions.
3. The MEAs should be strengthened individually and should collaborate together among themselves and with UNEP and CSD. Some of the MEAs deal with key issues like biodiversity, biosafety and climate but meet too seldom and make progress too slowly. There should be a more frequent tempo of negotiations. Then there are many areas of the environment where action is needed but lacking. The panel should list the issues where there is this absence of action and advocate new MEAS to be established. (examples include energy, sustainable consumption, sustainable production, sustainable agriculture, corporate accountability following from the Johannesburg Action Plan that mandated an international framework for the same, comprehensive agreement on chemicals and heavy metals including radioactive substances and to address the shifting of toxic industries from North to South).

On the social aspect, there is even less agreements, for example in the area of health there is only one health agreement (eg. in tobacco). There should be many more health-related multilateral agreements.

UNEP has in many aspects done good work. But its mandate is too narrow, as it only covers a few aspects of the environment. Its mandate should be expanded to for example include sustainable agriculture and fisheries and sustainable energy. UNEP's role in liaising with MEAs should also be strengthened, to give it a more coordinating role.

The CSD is the child of Rio and guardian of the Rio principles. The Rio framework should also be adopted by UNEP and should guide the operationalising of UNEP's work. If this is done, there could be the framework for greater collaboration between the CSD and UNEP.

As I said, all these institutions in sustainable development (UNEP, WHO, CSD, MEAs) must open up more to CSO participation including in the design and planning, not only in implementation of decisions.

4. Why do we stress the UN's role in sustainable development?
 - (i) Because we badly need more international cooperation.
 - (ii) Because other organizations like the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO lack the philosophical framework and the inclusive decision-making system that is required.
 - (iii) The UN has the framework and a better chance for inclusive decision-making, including for civil society.

5. The funding mechanism for channeling towards sustainable development should recognize the principles of multilateralism and not reflect narrow donor priorities.

6. At the country level, there is very weak capacity of UN system on environment and development and in supporting the work of environment NGOs and that support the rights of local communities. The country level

work of the UN should accord much greater priority to environment and sustainable development.